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SOME REMARKS ON MEMORY AND HERITAGE IN EUROPE

ABSTRACT The text concludes the contributions of the volume, accentuating the general reflections on European heritage which can be found described herein by the articles' authors. The conclusion refers to the general ideas of Europe with its specific values and the concepts of democratization, dealing with collective trauma as well as various narrative strategies used in the process of heritage invention and social use. Finally, a significant example of heritage interpretation is provided and focused on in the form of the *#heritage* exhibition held at the National Museum in Kraków. Special attention in this case is drawn to two contradictory paradigms of heritage interpretation, while the exhibition becomes a symbol of the complexity of the present debate on European identity in contemporary Poland/Europe.

Key words: heritage, Europeanization, exhibition, museums

In the history-conscious European societies, heritage has become a central and simultaneously highly contested issue. In the search for common identities on different levels, from the local to the European, attempts have been made to construct heritage as a cultural and historical basis on which the feeling of belonging can be built. And yet, heritage is also highly politicised, subject to manipulation and the 'politics of memory'.

In modern Europe, in the post-Enlightenment spirit of rationality, the hierarchical organisation of society and the dominating narrative of development and progress, heritage was employed in the construction of history determined by the evolutionary perspective and a set of values seen as objective and universal. Modern museums, to which much attention in the present volume has been devoted, are an example of such an approach to heritage. They aim at representing the objective truth about the past and culture, while their main goal is didactic, educational, telling the public the truth about cultural development and progress in a one-way communication which also rep-

resents and commemorates culture. Museums tell us what deserves to be remembered and 'rescued' and why, at the same time they confirm the dominant role of those who decide on the criteria and choose what and who is worthy of rescue.[1] By establishing the criteria of progress they also confirm the hierarchies.

In the European Union, the search for a common European identity was originally focused on the common contents and events in the European past.[2] This idea was informed by the modern concept of cultural and social evolution which suggested the need to create a narrative showing the progressive development of Europe through significant stages, markers and milestones of progress of universal significance. Then, in the spirit of diversity and pluralism, the new idea of integrating different national perspectives into a common value framework *that would make possible for the different views on the past to co-exist without causing conflicts* was formulated as the main European narrative of heritage.[3] Of course, this perspective required a consensus as to the basic European values which would be acceptable for all as the frame of reference in their collective identification and which would not exclude anyone on the basis of their heritage. These values, as expressed in European treaties, are freedom, human dignity, democracy, tolerance, pluralism, rule of law, and human rights. These values are seen as the foundation on which this common European identity is to be constructed, and they determine the present approach to the European heritage.

What then are the main challenges which the EU is now confronted with in the attempt to build its identity and to use heritage as a tool in this endeavour? There are some crucial questions and problems which ought to be mentioned in this context.

A tension still exists and is reflected in European discourses between the modern (as described briefly above) and the postmodern, or late modern, approach to heritage. The former looks for hierarchical development and progress, for objective criteria of value, and the construction of meaning based on objective historical knowledge and a developmental perspective. The distinctions between high and popular culture, centre and periphery, still exist and inform many interpretations, constructions and representations of heritage. The second is decentralised, relativistic, egalitarian and inclusive, trying to democratise the narrative of heritage and make its representation more dialogical and interactive. For the European narrative, the former approach encourages the presentation of Europe as based on its solid foundation of Ancient Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christianity, reinforcing its external boundaries, often exclusive and protecting its collective identity based on values of cultural tradition. The second is more inclusive, open and dialogical, based on values not so much rooted in tradition and the past but oriented to the future, representing Europe through those elements of heritage which suggest individualism, a critical approach, dialogue and the negotiation of meaning. Individual creativity with its roots in the Renaissance, liberal philosophy of man, and the ideas of pluralism, openness and tolerance define such an approach.

1 See: the article by Łukasz Bukowiecki in this volume.

2 See: the article by Łucja Piekarska-Duraj and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa in this volume.

3 See: ibid.

On a national level, a good example of such a duality of approaches to heritage was the exhibition *#heritage* which in recent months was to be seen in the main building of the National Museum in Kraków.[4] It consisted of a large collection of symbolic representations and objects, artistic visualizations and literary associations which all referred in an affirmative way to the most popular, often stereotypical images and concepts with which the very traditional, past oriented, national-centred (often nationalistic) version of Polish national identity has been constructed. The narrative was so one-sided and uncritical that one could think it was not serious, but a kind of provocative joke or pastiche. On the second floor of the same museum building there was a simultaneous installation linked to the main exhibition of a much smaller, modest kind, consisting of a number of individual visual representations of symbolically significance objects, people and events, each of which individually having considerable significance in the Polish national narrative. Visitors to the installation were encouraged to create their own composition by combining these elements – images into their own syntax, representing their individual interpretation of national heritage. The main exhibition and the installation represented two opposing approaches to heritage – one imposed in an authoritative way as a top-down construction, another democratic, participatory, and individually creative.

The presence of Europe in heritage construction is another interesting and important question. How is Europe represented? How, if at all, it is referred to in museums, exhibitions and many other representations of heritage? Here a comparison between a Polish and a Swedish case, as described in this volume, is a good example.[5] In the Swedish case of museum narrative, Europe is implicit, not explicitly mentioned 'by name', but present in its values which are represented. In the Polish case, on the other hand, Europe is mentioned frequently. The message that Poland belongs to Europe is sent across directly, as if it may not be obvious and taken for granted by visitors. As far as European values are concerned, the Polish museum was largely nation-centred, unlike the Swedish one, and the European context of values was either not understood or ignored. This comparison confirms that, in Poland at least, Europe is a myth, a symbolic reference to an external being, attractive but distant. But it is not a reality of values involved in social practices, policies and visions.

There is no doubt that heritage is a valuable asset in the struggle for recognition and also for dominance. The democratization and integration of Europe require that a more equal balance should be created regarding the presence of heritage of different nations, regions, and communities in the European symbolic space, in which European heritage and identity are integrated. Previously marginalised areas and communities may now have their voice heard, and their own heritage, if understood and integrated in the European symbolic space, may enrich Europe and the treasury of its values. But this approach requires more balanced relations of power, especially in its symbolic as-

[4] The exhibition *#heritage* – whose curator was Andrzej Szczerski – was held in the National Museum in Kraków (23 June 2017 – 14 January 2018).

[5] See: the article by Łucja Piekarska-Duraj and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa in this volume.

pect. Such a dialogue of heritage and values which it represents may also lead to the reconciliation of nations and communities which find a European frame of reference to be a platform of dialogue. But in such a context of democratization and egalitarianism of heritage, another problem is hidden. Here may be, and indeed there is, a conflict between values regarded as central to Europe, the EU and its integration (such as the rule of law, liberal democracy, pluralism, openness, gender equality and others), on which there has been a consensus within the mainstream European public sphere, and particular, often marginal, but nevertheless present and sometimes noisy expressions of values which are not compatible with it. The example is the right-wing populism increasingly present in many EU member states, or illiberal democracies which have become the official political and axiological doctrine of Poland and Hungary.

Conflict over memory and heritage also often develop within one national community, as it is the case of Poland, where 'politics of memory' is one of the main instruments used by the state authorities in its search for the legitimacy of power. One aspect of it is a contrast between what they call 'pedagogy of shame', which they attribute to the previous, liberal government, and their own 'pedagogy of pride'. The argument here is that the 'pedagogy of shame' consisted in making Polish society remember their own responsibilities for domination over others and for causing the suffering of others in its turbulent national history in order to learn the lessons of the past. The 'pedagogy of pride', in contrast, emphasizes those moments in history that Poles ought to be proud of. In particular, this conflict of construction of memory refers to the Holocaust and memory of World War II. The 'pedagogy of shame' makes Poles remember the dark side of the past, especially the indifference of most Poles with regard to the Holocaust and the crimes of those who collaborated with the Nazis. The 'pedagogy of pride' remembers those Poles who risked their lives to help the Jews. The memory of the Holocaust is a perfect example of the Europeanization of heritage. Even if in some nations, including Poles, this is primarily a national memory and is represented as such, membership of an integrating Europe requires that the memory of the Holocaust be developed and represented in the European frame of reference, as a common European heritage and the commemoration of the darkest moment in a common European history.[6]

The present volume discusses various aspects of the diversity of heritage and memory in Europe, using in particular interesting comparisons between Poland and Sweden – two national societies with very different histories but facing many common challenges, of which Europeanization is not the least important. This comparison helps us to understand the dilemmas which Europe must try to solve in order to progress in its integration. Heritage and memory, including the politicization of them, identity construction on different levels, the reconciliation and struggle for recognition of marginalised communities, and the creation of a common, European symbolic space as a forum of dialogue and democratization of memory – these are but a few of those dilemmas which will determine the future of Europe.

[6] See: the article by Elisabeth Wassermann in this volume.

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